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The present status of the PhD. in English is briefly discussed. Don Cameron Allen's "The PhD. in English and American Literature" is praised as a much-needed study which can help the English profession revitalize graduate programs. Several of Allen's conclusions are briefly summarized. (BN)

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THE PH.D. AND THE PROFESSION

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For years the Profession has been understandably worried over difficulties inherent to the doctoral program in English. As the need for trained personnel sharply increased, the number of ABD's (and persons of less preparation) grew steadily until they came to constitute a majority of college English teachers. Yet key questions like What is the Ph.D.? and Why does it take so long? remained unanswered. Emphasis on acquisition of the degree combined with reliance on a tradition that had supposedly produced trained humanists obscured the original reasons for establishing the doctorate and persuaded people that it was a cultural as well as a professional degree.

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Across the continent great universities -- among them, Yale, Michigan, and Stanford -- have recently attempted to do something about the situation. But the programs of individual colleges have necessarily been piecemeal solutions to what is essentially a nationwide problem. There is no organization on the accreditation of graduate departments, and there is no regional or professional group willing or able to take up the chore of accreditation.

At this juncture Don Cameron Allen was urged by John Fisher, the forward-looking Executive Secretary of the Modern Language Association, to undertake a study of the Ph.D. The result is an important book, The Ph.D. in English and American Literature (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1968), which comes out at just the right time to help the Profession achieve its major task -- recruitment and training of the best men and women -- by revitalizing graduate programs.

After a short but informative chapter on the development of the Ph.D., Allen succinctly and clearly summarizes the results of several questionnaires distributed to important groups in the profession. He recognizes that the tabulations -- not the raw material of universal laws -- are merely votes. After displaying what we think of ourselves and our programs, Allen draws his own conclusions. He then presents the questionnaires and the tabulations so that we may draw our own conclusions.

Allen is definite: "There is little doubt, and this survey supports it, that the time has come to not only define the doctorate in English and American literature, but also to make the training that leads to it more rational, more attuned to our century and its demands." He recommends a three or four-year degree with a preliminary examination, a short dissertation (perhaps a work of original literary or critical merit), a foreign language requirement only for those who need it (medievalists, linguists, et al.), a series of seminars as the chief means of graduate training, and supervised practice teaching for one or two years. He would eliminate the defense of the dissertation. And he would provide opportunities for postdoctoral study. While Allen recognizes the reluctance of many in the Profession to accept an intermediate degree, he also sees its value as a formal recognition dignifying what is at present a curious status for the ABD's.

Allen concludes The Ph.D. in English and American Literature with the hope that the great foundations or the federal government will help establish model institutes for post doctoral study. Let us broaden the scale with the hope that John Fisher and other officers of MLA can persuade the great foundations and the federal government to support distinguished professors and universities in revitalization of Ph.D. programs so that they can set the tone and provide the models for the entire country.

Not that this will end the matter. There is so much to be done: definition of the degree, uniformity of standards and requirements, training of supervisors of teaching, establishment of undergraduate programs leading to the Ph.D. sequence, etc. For pointing the way and showing what is to be done, the Profession should be grateful to Don Cameron Allen and the officers of MLA.